THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Senate

Wednesday 11 November 2026, 9:00 – 10:00am
Microsoft Teams

Agenda

1. Welcome and Apologies	
2. **Governance of programme closures** For approval	**S 26/27 2 A**
3. Governance of programme closures - response For noting	**S 26/27 2 B**

S 26/27 2 A

Senate

11 November 2026

Governance of programme closures

Description of paper

1. This paper addresses the governance of programme closures at the University of Edinburgh. It identifies inconsistencies within the University's current policy framework regarding the role of School Boards of Studies in closure decisions, and apparent divergences between that framework and recent practice.
2. This paper does not, in itself, constitute a judgment on the merits of any individual programme closure. Instead, it addresses whether the University's established governance processes for closures are internally coherent, whether they have been followed, and what Senate's role should be in assuring both.

Fit with Primary Responsibilities

3. A4: To oversee the implementation of policy relating to teaching, learning and teaching quality assurance, including research undertaken by students as part of a programme of study.
4. A8: To make recommendations as a consultative body to Court on certain matters relating to teaching, learning and teaching quality assurance, including research undertaken by students as part of a programme of study, where indicated by legislation.

Action requested / Recommendation

5. Senate is asked to **approve** the following:

    5.1. (M1) Senate recommends to Court that the Terms of Reference for Boards of Studies must explicitly preserve the requirement, currently in force under Court Resolution No. 5 of 2019, that all credit-bearing courses and programmes — including their closure — are subject to approval by a School Board of Studies.

    5.2. (M2) Senate requests that SQAC and APRC review the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy (PCAM) and “Programme Closure – Guidance for Colleges and Schools (January 2026)” to address two issues:

    (i) PCAM Table 1 requires School Boards of Studies to endorse the closure of programmes and awards, but section 4 (and the Guidance document) does not explicitly describe the required role for School Boards of Studies in closures.

    (ii) The role of other bodies (including the University Academic Projects Board) in the approval framework is not described in PCAM.

    Revisions recommended by SQAC and APRC should be presented to Senate for approval.

    5.3. (M3) Senate requests a report, to be presented at the next available meeting, listing all programme closures approved since 1 August 2025, and recording for each: the date of consideration by the relevant Board(s) of Studies; the approving College committee; any further body involved in the decision; evidence of the student involvement required by PCAM paragraph 2.15; and, for joint, interdisciplinary and collaborative programmes, evidence of engagement with partner Boards of Studies and external partners.

Background and context

6. The approval and closure of credit-bearing courses and programmes is a matter of regulating and superintending the teaching of the University, and therefore falls within Senate's statutory remit, exercised through its delegation to Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC), Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC), College committees and School Boards of Studies.

7. The **Terms of Reference for Boards of Studies** are set out in Court Resolution No. 5 of 2019.

   7.1. The Terms of Reference state that:

   > "All credit-bearing courses and programmes (new, changes to and closure) must be subject to approval by a Board of Studies."

   7.2. A new version of the Terms of Reference for Boards of Studies exists in draft form: Draft Court Resolution 7/2026 was provided for Senate "to comment" in S 26/27 1 W, however no time was available during the meeting for discussion of the paper. This new version of the Terms of Reference does not mention course or programme closure.

8. The **Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy (PCAM)** was reviewed by SQAC in 2025/26[1] and took effect on 1 August 2026.

   8.1. Paragraph 3.1 of PCAM states that authority for programme and course approval, changes and closure "is delegated by the University, via the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC), to Colleges and, where appropriate, to School Boards of Studies." It also notes that "Colleges must retain authority to approve major changes to existing programmes and new programmes, and the closure of programmes."

   8.2. Table 1 of PCAM (p. 8) sets out the levels of approval. Under "BOARD OF STUDIES (SCHOOL)", Boards approve "closure of courses" and endorse "closure of programmes and awards". Under "COLLEGE COMMITTEE", College committees approve "closure of programmes and awards" and retain "Oversight (method to be determined by the College)" of "closure of courses". The table is prefaced by the statement that "all stages prior to where a decision is approved should be completed."

   8.3. Paragraph 3.2 of PCAM states that "The review and approval of programme and course proposals must ensure a transparent and auditable 'paper-trail' providing a rationale for decisions."

   8.4. Section 4 of PCAM includes a copy of the new draft of the Terms of Reference for Boards of Studies. Paragraph 4.3 states that "Boards of Studies must review and approve new courses and programmes, and amendments to existing courses and programmes"; paragraph 4.4, which lists the responsibilities of Boards of Studies, is likewise silent on closure. Paragraph 4.5 does mention a responsibility for "offering advice on the School's portfolio of programmes".

9. The **Programme Closure – Guidance for Colleges and Schools (January 2026)** document is published at https://registryservices.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2026-10/Programme%20Closure%20Guidance%20for%20Colleges%20and%20Schools_0.pdf

[1] While the Policy cover page states it was approved on 23 April 2026, it was in fact discussed at a SQAC meeting on that date but not approved (the minutes note that updates were requested and a revised version was to be brought to the Committee at a later date "for final approval").

9.1. The Guidance document does not include any details of who is responsible for its drafting or approval, however it is linked to from College SharePoint sites; for instance CSE Academic Affairs links to the document from https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/CSCE/AcademicAffairs/SitePages/Curriculum-Development-and-Approval.aspx noting that "Academic Quality and Standards has issued new Closure Guidance and a new form, superseding other paperwork from February 2026."

9.2. The Guidance document sets out a six-step process. Steps 1 and 2 cover stakeholder engagement and analysis by Schools; Step 3 is "College review and sign off"; Steps 4–6 cover communications, student meetings and evaluation. No step explicitly requires consideration or endorsement by a Board of Studies.

9.3. The Guidance document states that "Proposals regarding programme closures may originate from the School (e.g. via Boards of Studies) or from the College (e.g. via College Portfolio Management Boards, or equivalent)", and that "In all cases, Schools should complete 'STEP 2 – Complete analysis: students on programme and teach out scenarios' and submit a Programme Closure Proposal Form to the College Portfolio Management Board, or equivalent, for approval."

9.4. Under Step 3, the Guidance document states that "In many cases, the programme closure will have already been approved by the School Board of Studies. This information should be clear Programme Closure Proposal Form, if not, the College should request further information." The phrasing indicates that Board of Studies approval is regarded as usual but not as a requirement.

9.5. The Guidance document records that "'Low risk' closures may be signed off by the College Portfolio Management Board, or equivalent Committee, with any closures identified as 'medium risk' or 'high risk' escalated to the Head of College and the Associate Principal and Deputy Secretary, Students."

10. Further guidance also exists at College level. For instance, CAHSS publishes its own guidance, **"Suspend, Close or Pause a Programme in CAHSS"** at https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/hss/college-office/academic-administration/SitePages/Programme-Suspension.aspx

10.1. The CAHSS Guidance links to the "University-issued Programme Closures Guidance" described in paragraph 9.

10.2. The CAHSS Guidance also includes a dedicated section on "Joint/Collaborative programmes" setting out the contact required with partner Boards of Studies. This states that:

> "For joint programmes, the owning School should liaise with the partner School to make them aware of the intention to pause or suspend/close a programme. For suspensions/closures, owning School should share the closure proposal, which should be presented at the partner School's Board of Studies (and to the Head of School, if appropriate). The closure will be formally approved by the owning School, but College will require evidence (e.g. BoS minutes) that the closure has been reviewed by the other School and an opportunity to raise any concerns or questions has been made available."

10.3. In the 21 October 2026 meeting of Senate, it was noted by a Convenor of a Board of Studies outwith CAHSS that these steps had not been followed for a joint programme in which their School was a partner; the programme was closed despite there having been no contact with the partner School's Board of Studies. Colleagues within CAHSS report a similar experience of joint

programmes being closed without the required consultation with the partner School's Board of Studies.

11. An email to all CAHSS staff on 2 September 2026 stated: "We have used the institutionally agreed Academic Size and Shape principles and agreed minimum enrolment thresholds to determine programmes that will close to new admissions from 2027. These closures were approved by the College and subsequently by the University Academic Project Board on 19th August."

12. The University Academic Project Board is not identified in PCAM, in Table 1 of that Policy, or in the Programme Closure Guidance as a body with a role in the approval of programme closures.

13. Responding to a report in The Herald (15 October 2026) on programme closures in CAHSS, a University spokesperson stated that proposals had followed the University's "robust governance processes", and that "As a large and complex institution, we have clear decision-making processes supported by well-established governance structures with representation from across our community."

Discussion

14. Three issues arise from the facts set out above.

    14.1. The policy framework is internally inconsistent. Table 1 of PCAM requires Boards of Studies to endorse programme closures before College approval, while Court Resolution No. 5 of 2019 requires approval from Board of Studies for such changes. Section 4 of the same Policy (quoting the amended Terms of Reference set out in Draft Court Resolution 7/2026), and the Programme Closure Guidance all omit closure from the described functions of Boards of Studies. Staff seeking to establish what the required process is will reach different answers depending on which document they consult.

    14.2. The proposed amendment to the Board of Studies Terms of Reference would introduce further ambiguity. If adopted as drafted, Draft Court Resolution 7/2026 would remove from the governing instrument of Boards of Studies the only unambiguous statement that closures require Board of Studies approval, while leaving Table 1 of PCAM in place.

    14.3. Statements that closures "followed our robust governance processes" cannot presently be verified by Senate. The public account of the 2026 CAHSS closures describes approval by the College and by the University Academic Project Board, a body that does not appear in the PCAM Policy. There are no available records of endorsement by School Boards of Studies, however the auditable paper-trail required by PCAM paragraph 3.2 should be capable of demonstrating it. The report requested in M3 would allow Senate to establish the position on the evidence rather than on assertion.

15. The role of Boards of Studies enables the academic consequences of a closure to be scrutinised by those with disciplinary expertise and with student representation.

    15.1. *Joint, interdisciplinary and collaborative provision.* Closing a programme or course owned by one School may have an impact on programmes owned by others (e.g., through the availability of elective options). The Programme Closure Guidance requires Schools to "engage with the relevant stakeholders in other Schools to discuss implications of closure and identify any risks as soon as possible". The CAHSS Guidance explicitly sets out requirements for contact with partner Boards of Studies. This ought to be a mechanism to surface any potential cross-School effects.

15.2. *Student involvement.* PCAM paragraph 2.15 requires that “Students must be proactively involved at the earliest practicable point in programme and course design, development, approval, changes and closure processes.” Routing closures away from Boards of Studies, on which student representatives sit, diminishes the student voice by removing an opportunity for student involvement in decision-making.

15.3. *Obligations to current and prospective students.* PCAM paragraphs 5.8–5.10 and the Programme Closure Guidance describe the substantial obligations regarding the “teaching-out” of closed programmes alongside other options including alternative provision, referral to comparable institutions and the refund of fees. The feasibility of teach-out under a modified Degree Programme Table is an academic judgment that Boards of Studies are constituted to make.

Resource implications

16. The review requested in M2 will require effort from SQAC and APRC, however this is in line with their existing remit. The report requested in M3 would require Colleges and/or Academic Quality and Standards to collate information, however PCAM paragraph 3.2 already requires this information to exist in auditable form.

Risk Management

17. Closures effected without the approval or endorsement required by the governing instruments carry a risk of challenge, including by affected students. Divergence between published policy and actual practice carries regulatory risk, and reputational risk where public statements about governance cannot be evidenced.

Responding to the Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development Goals

18. N/A

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

19. Changes to PCAM may require a new EqIA.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

20. Decisions should be communicated to Court (particularly regarding M1), the University Executive, SQAC, APRC, Heads of College and Conveners of Boards of Studies. The recommended revisions to PCAM (from M2) and the report on programme closures (from M3) should be brought to Senate at the next available opportunity.

Consultation

21. This paper arose out of discussion at the 21 October 2026 meeting of Senate, with elected members contributing to drafting the paper.

Further information

Author(s) **Presenter(s)**

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Freedom of information

Open

Senate

11 November 2026

Governance of Programme Closures – Response

Description of paper

1. This paper provides responses to the motions in Paper S26/27 2A: Governance of programme closures.

Fit with Primary Responsibilities

2. A4: To oversee the implementation of policy relating to teaching, learning and teaching quality assurance, including research undertaken by students as part of a programme of study.
3. A8: To make recommendations as a consultative body to Court on certain matters relating to teaching, learning and teaching quality assurance, including research undertaken by students as part of a programme of study, where indicated by legislation.
4. D25: To make recommendations to Court in relation to certain matters (e.g. creation of new degrees, amending existing degree regulations) as specified in the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966; and to act as a consultative body to Court on all draft Court Resolutions.

Action requested / Recommendation

5. Senate is asked to note the paper.

Background and context

6. This paper was prepared in response to Paper S26/27 2A: Governance of programme closures which was submitted with a requisition for a special meeting of Senate.

Discussion

7. **Motion 1 (M1)**

> *Senate recommends to Court that the Terms of Reference for Boards of Studies must explicitly preserve the requirement, currently in force under Court Resolution No. 5 of 2019, that all credit-bearing courses and programmes — including their closure — are subject to approval by a School Board of Studies.*

8. **Relevant text from current Board of Studies Terms of Reference, approved in 2019:**
"All credit-bearing courses and programmes (new, changes to and closure) must be subject to approval by a Board of Studies."

9. **Relevant text from proposed change to Board of Studies Terms of Reference (Paper W),** to be effected by amended draft Resolution No.7/2026, which is currently undergoing consultation**:**

"Boards of Studies must review and approve new courses and programmes, and amendments to existing courses and programmes, including credit-bearing and non-credit bearing courses. New programmes and major changes to programmes (as defined in the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy) must also be approved by the relevant College Committee."

10. The proposed changes to the Board of Studies Terms of Reference are designed to align those with the more recently reviewed Programme and Course Approval and Management (PCAM) policy. On review and following completion of an extended consultation period to the Board of Studies Terms of Reference (draft Resolution No.7/2026), we will consider if further changes to this text are required to ensure full consistency and alignment across policies.

11. The role and authority of Boards of Studies as set out in the PCAM policy were unchanged in the updates to the policy in April 2026 (and have been unchanged since at least 2016).

12. Paragraph 3.1 of the PCAM policy states that “Colleges must retain authority to approve major changes to existing programmes and new programmes, and the closure of programmes.” The Board of Studies Terms of Reference states that "All credit-bearing courses and programmes (new, changes to and closure) must be subject to approval by a Board of Studies."
    Therefore, there is an inconsistency between the PCAM Policy and the Board of Studies Terms of Reference.

13. **Motion 2 (M2)**

    Senate requests that SQAC and APRC review the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy (PCAM) and “Programme Closure – Guidance for Colleges and Schools (January 2026)” to address two issues:

    (ii) PCAM Table 1 requires School Boards of Studies to endorse the closure of programmes and awards, but section 4 (and the Guidance document) does not explicitly describe the required role for School Boards of Studies in closures.

    (ii) The role of other bodies (including the University Academic Projects Board) in the approval framework is not described in PCAM.

    Revisions recommended by SQAC and APRC should be presented to Senate for approval.

14. Review of relevant policy and guidance will be informed by the final Boards of Studies Terms of Reference as consulted on and ultimately approved by Court by way of Court Resolution.

15. **Motion 3 (M3)**

    (M3) Senate requests a report, to be presented at the next available meeting, listing all programme closures approved since 1 August 2025, and recording for each: the date of consideration by the relevant Board(s) of Studies; the approving College

committee; any further body involved in the decision; evidence of the student involvement required by PCAM paragraph 2.15; and, for joint, interdisciplinary and collaborative programmes, evidence of engagement with partner Boards of Studies and external partners.

16. We will aim to provide this report for the February 2027 meeting, noting the resource required for this request and that the deadline has passed for paper submission for the December meeting.

Resource Implications

17. The resourcing implications for Boards of Studies were considered by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) when considering revisions to the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy (PCAM).
18. The resource implications of Motion 1 and 2 will depend on the final Boards of Studies Terms of Reference as approved by Court by way of Court Resolution. There will be resource implications for Motion 3 in relation to gathering the requested information.

Risk Management

19. The proposed revision to the Boards of Studies Terms of Reference via Court Resolution seeks to ensure consistency across University policies.

Responding to the Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development Goals

20. Not applicable

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

21. The equality, diversity and inclusion implications for Boards of Studies were considered by the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC) when considering revisions to the Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy (PCAM).

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

22. The University Court will be informed of any Senate recommendations via routine reporting.
23. Any changes to University policy will be communicated via existing channels. These include dissemination via the Board of Studies Network, as well as coverage in New and Updated Policies communications and staff briefings provided by Academic Quality and Standards.

Consultation

24. This paper is provided in response to Senate paper S26/27 2A: Governance of programme closures.

Further information

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S 26/27 2 B

Freedom of information

Open